

# Amateurs in Action

*Recounts of ham radio operators who have used their time and skills to help others in a time of need*



## Tooele chopper down

November 2015 rolled around, and it was time to perform some routine maintenance, and check on the battery of the amateur radio repeater on Flat Top Mountain, in the Oquirrh Mountains near Ophir. Tuesday the 17th looked like a good day for the two-man helicopter team for a run, and around 8:30 am they took off to get it done. The pilot was Spike Kinghorn of Classic Aviation, and he was accompanied by Dave Williams WA7GIE, a former TCEM (Tooele County Emergency Management) employee.



The maintenance check was scheduled to last all of ten minutes, and upon landing on the mountain, the pilot didn't even turn off the engine. It wasn't long before ice began building on the rotors, however, and freeze-warning alarms started going off, so Spike shut the chopper down. He and Dave tried to knock the ice off the rotors, and restarted the engine several times, but were unsuccessful at getting the chopper to take off.

Dave attempted to get hold of Andy Tanner KD7DBB, Communication Technician for TCEM, by cell phone, but the contact was so spotty they turned to ham radio. After discussing the situation, the two decided it would be best to request the help of Tooele County SAR (Search and Rescue). Andy then drove in from Salt Lake City to meet up with the SAR team, but remained at base to coordinate the effort. Dave kept in touch with rescuers through his ham radio HT while he and Spike sought shelter in the helicopter. Andy later said the temperature only partway to the peak was already 10 degrees, and that it was likely below zero on the peak.

The SAR team started a risky night-time hike with supplies to the summit. Andy relayed periodic messages from Dave to his family, but kept radio contact at a minimum, to conserve precious battery life. The two-person team reached the chopper at the summit just as Dave's radio gave out. A helicopter from Vernal was dispatched to attempt a rescue, but the fog was too thick for it to land at first. A second attempt did the trick, and the rescue took place Wednesday around 2:30 am.



*Tooele County SAR, grouping*

The pair had spent over 18 hours on the mountain. *...ham radio had a humongous effect on [the rescue], Andy later said. We would have had no idea they were even there, really. He added, ...they very well could have died.*

You can read more about this story on [Tooele Online](#) and on [KUTV 2News](#).